

## A STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF CAREGIVER–ADMINISTERED MUSIC THERAPY ON THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN AUTISTIC CHILDREN

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Language development is identified as one of the major developmental areas most affected by autism spectrum disorder. Developing language in children with autism is a challenging task, emphasizing the importance of using intervention methods that align with their interests. This study aimed to examine whether caregiver-implemented music therapy influences the language development of children with autism. The objectives of the study were to determine (1) whether music therapy affects the language development of autistic children, (2) how this effect varies according to gender and age, and (3) the correlation between receptive and expressive language development. The sample consisted of 50 children aged 3–7 years diagnosed with autism, selected from a special school in the Gampaha District and the Daily Training Centre affiliated with the Kalubowila Teaching Hospital. The intervention included three children's songs. Before and after a two-month training period conducted with the involvement of parents, language development was measured using a narrative-based assessment tool. Six specific words from the songs were used to measure improvement in expressive language. Data were analyzed using SPSS. A paired sample t-test was applied to compare language development before and after therapy, showing a statistically significant improvement ( $P = 0.001$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). An independent sample t-test examined gender and age differences, revealing statistically significant variations. Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated a positive correlation between receptive and expressive language development. The study concludes that music therapy can serve as an effective intervention method for enhancing the language development of children with autism. Improving the quality and implementation of such therapy could provide substantial benefits for their communication development.

**Keywords:** *Autistic Children, Language Development, Caregiver–Administered, Music Therapy*